Drums

METALLICA'S Lars Ulrich

CD INCLUDED

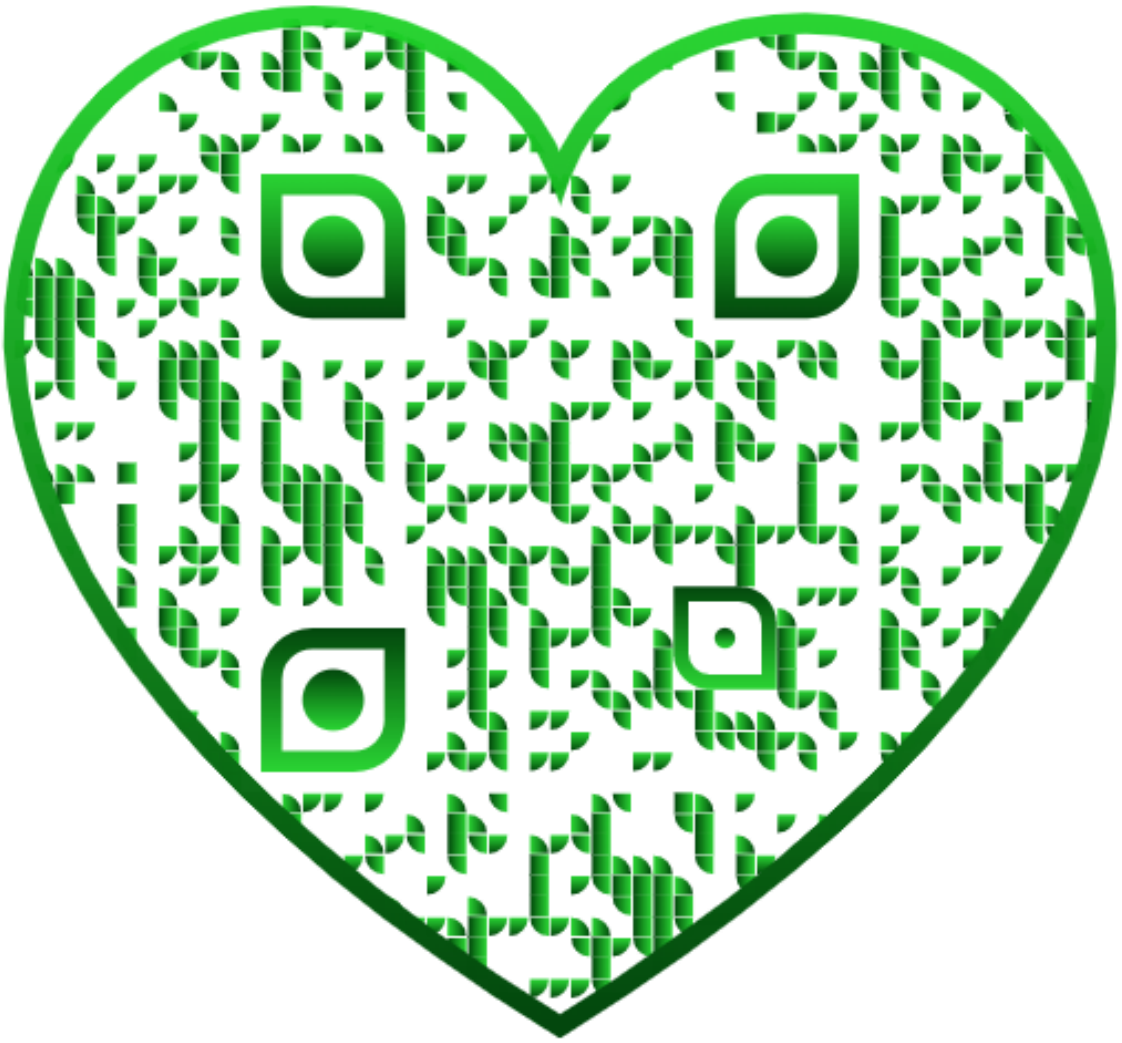
by Dino Fauci

An up-close look at the playing style of heavy metal's leading drummer

Includes actual transcribed examples of METALLICA hits

Featuring:

Double Bass ▪ Technique ▪ Feel Changes ▪ Odd Time Signatures
Ensemble Figures ▪ Drum Fills



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Lars Ulrich

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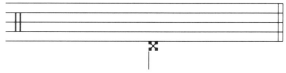
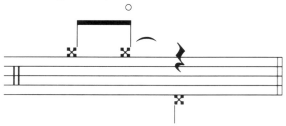
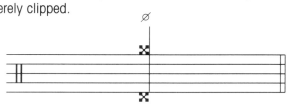
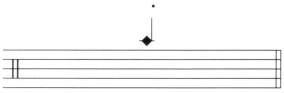
DRUM NOTATION LEGEND

HI-HAT

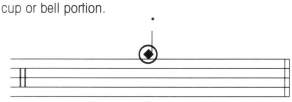
OPEN AND CLOSED HI-HAT:
Strike the open hi-hat on notes labeled with an *o*. Strike the closed hi-hat on unlabeled notes.

HI-HAT WITH FOOT: Clap hi-hat cymbals together with foot pedal.

HI-HAT WITH SLUR: The open hi-hat is struck and then closed with the foot on the beat indicated by the hi-hat w/foot notation below, creating a *shoop* sound.

HI-HAT BARK: The open hi-hat is struck and is immediately, almost simultaneously closed so that the *shoop* sound is severely clipped.

CYMBALS

CHOKE: Hit the crash cymbal and catch it immediately with the other hand, producing a short, choked crash sound.



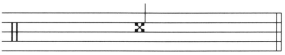
BELL OF CYMBAL: Hit the cymbal near the center, directly on the cup or bell portion.

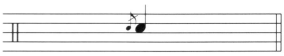
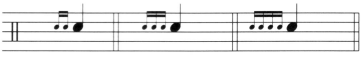


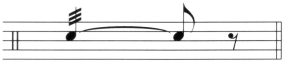
CYMBAL ROLL: Play a roll on the cymbal rapidly enough to produce a sustained, uninterrupted *shhh* sound lasting for the number of beats indicated.

DRUMS

CROSS STICK: Anchor the tip end of the stick on the snare drum skin at the eight o'clock position, two to three inches from the rim. Then raise and lower the butt end, striking the rim at the two o'clock position, producing a clicky woodblock-type sound.



FLAM: Hit the drum with both sticks, one slightly after the other, producing a single, thick-sounding note.

RUFF: Play the grace notes rapidly and as close to the principal note as possible. The grace notes are unaccented and should be played slightly before the beat. The principal note is accented and played directly on the beat.

CLOSED ROLL: Play a roll on the snare drum creating a sustained, uninterrupted *tshhh* sound lasting for the duration of the rhythm indicated and with no break between the two tied notes.



The Drum Style Of LARS ULRICH

Lars Ulrich, the foot-blazing, time-twisting force behind Metallica's pulsating rhythmical fury, was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1963. As a young boy he began to play tennis, and when he was ranked one of the top-ten players in Denmark at the age of 16, it seemed certain that Lars was headed for a professional tennis career. But at the same time, Lars had been undergoing a transformation.

Using tennis rackets as imaginary guitars, broomsticks as microphone stands, and cardboard boxes as drums, Lars and his friends would pretend to be a famous rock band, and it was Lars who somehow always ended up playing drums—or should we say boxes. Finally surrendering to his obviously intense desire, his grandmother gave him a kit of mismatched drums when he was just 12 years old. Overjoyed to have equipment of any quality, Lars began pounding toward a future that he couldn't foresee—for now, his drumming was just a diversion from his Spartan regime of tennis practice and school.

To further Lars' tennis career, the Ulrich family moved to Newport Beach, California, where he could compete on the more prestigious U.S. circuit. After only a short time, however, the vision of their son as a tennis star began to fade. In the face of the intensely fierce competition, Lars rapidly lost interest in tennis and longed to experience other things—one of which happened to be rock 'n' roll.

Lars decided to take music more seriously and began taking drum lessons at a local music store. It didn't take him long to realize that years of learning basics and practicing rudiments were not for him—he just wanted to play with other people and do his own thing. Attracted to the Europeanized sounds of Saxon, Iron Maiden, Motorhead and Def Leppard, he placed an add in the local music paper in search of like-minded players who shared his tastes and sensibility. Rhythm guitarist and future writing partner James Hetfield responded.

The nucleus of Metallica was born.

The original version of the band included Dave Mustaine (guitar) and Ron McGovney (bass). Unsatisfied with that line-up, Lars sought out Bay Area–bassist Cliff Burton. Cliff agreed to join the band, but only if they would relocate to San Francisco. Metallica's following happened to be stronger there than it was in Los Angeles, so Lars and James agreed, and made the move north. They subsequently met lead guitarist Kirk Hammett—finding the final link in the definitive sound that became Metallica.

The band's first two recordings, *Kill 'Em All* and *Ride The Lightning*, had minor success in the metal underground. Tragically, after the release of their ground-breaking, third LP, *Master Of Puppets*, Cliff Burton was killed in a bus accident in Europe. Reeling from their loss but determined to carry on, they recruited bassist Jason Newsted.

Proving to be stronger than ever with their successful 1988 release, *...And Justice For All*, Metallica took metal to new heights. Combining punk rock rhythmic and vocal styles with Euro-metal guitarwork, they had developed a distinctive, classic sound that stood alone at the top of the thrash metal world.

Over the years, Lars' approach has been fairly consistent, although the "feel" has changed to some extent. Metallica's second album, *Ride The Lightning*, has an open, melodic feel. On songs such as "Fight Fire With Fire" or "Trapped Under Ice," both of which are played at extremely fast tempos, a relaxed feel is still maintained. This differs from the much tighter feel on *Master Of Puppets* or *...And Justice For All*, in which the notes are played evenly, cleanly, and sound almost mathematical in their machine-like precision and accuracy.

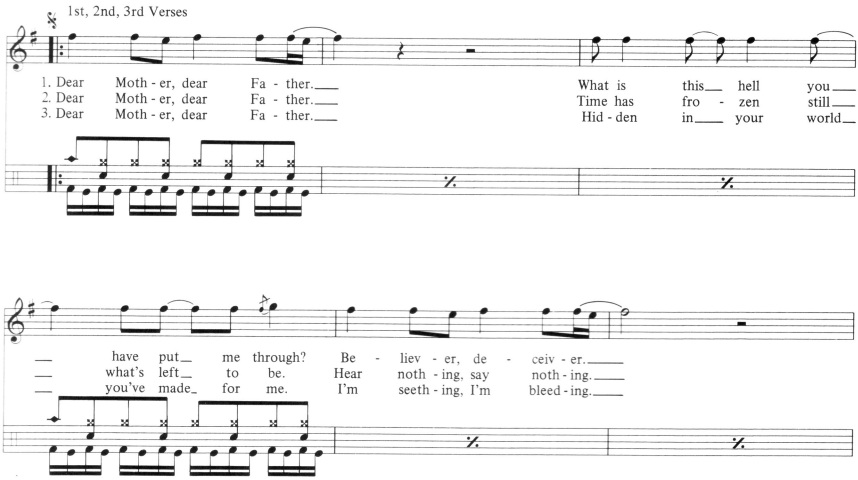
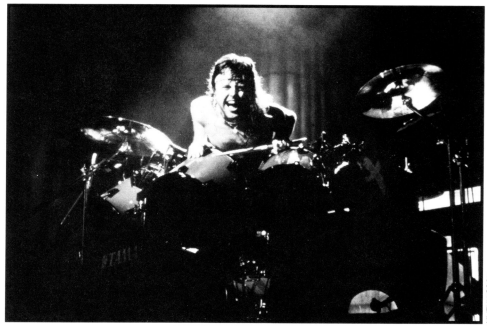
Here are four of the components that distinguish Lars' style: 1) Flurries of consecutive 16th notes on the bass drums, supporting the song's intensity; 2) Strengthening beats two and four with preceding 16th-note triplets on the bass drums; 3) Turning the beat around without preparation; and 4) Throwing in odd-time bars (2/4, 5/4, 7/8), giving the music an interesting and unusual twist.

From the very first album to the present, Lars has evolved his style of drumming to keep it alive and exciting. Abandoning formal training after only a few months, the theory of "play what you feel," "just do it," and "practice, practice, practice," has worked well for Lars. Exactly how it works will become evident as we take a closer look at the distinctive elements that make Lars Ulrich a true speed metal master.

DOUBLE BASS DRUMMING

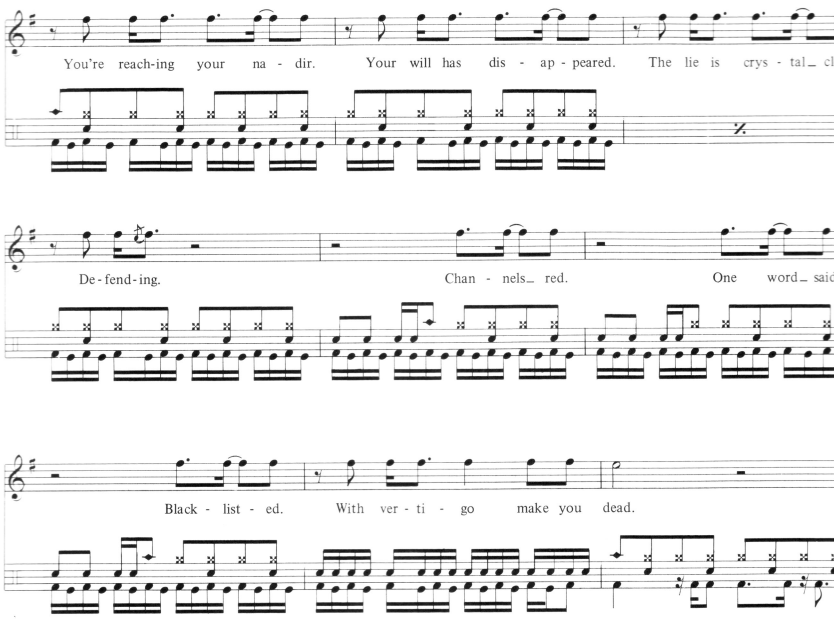
First, let's take a look at the amazing foot dexterity developed by the double-bass drummer extraordinaire. Sixteenth notes whiz by in a flurry, played cleanly and evenly—as though played by the hands. This technique has become a stylistic convention in speed metal, and one that Lars executes with machine gun rapidity. For an excellent example of this technique, let's look at the verse section in "Dyers Eve" (*...And Justice For All).*

Notice how evenly the notes are played. The snare hits on the *and* of every beat. Start this very slowly and make sure to keep it even as you increase the tempo.

1 Ex. 1 Dyers Eve: Verse



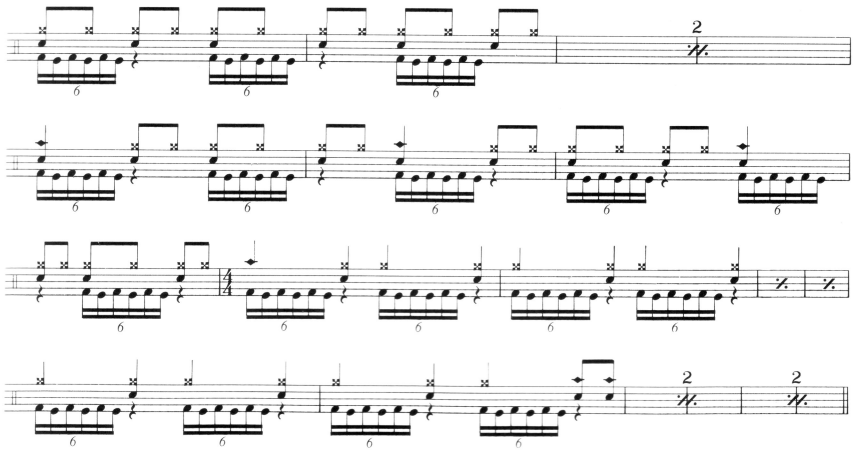
ROSS HALFIN

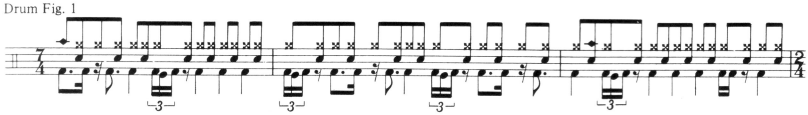
This example is from "The Shortest Straw" (*...And Justice For All*), third verse, bar 9. Lars keeps constant 16th notes moving on the bass drums as he plays a hand pattern over it in bars 13 through 16. This acts as a brief solo part, without disrupting the groove.

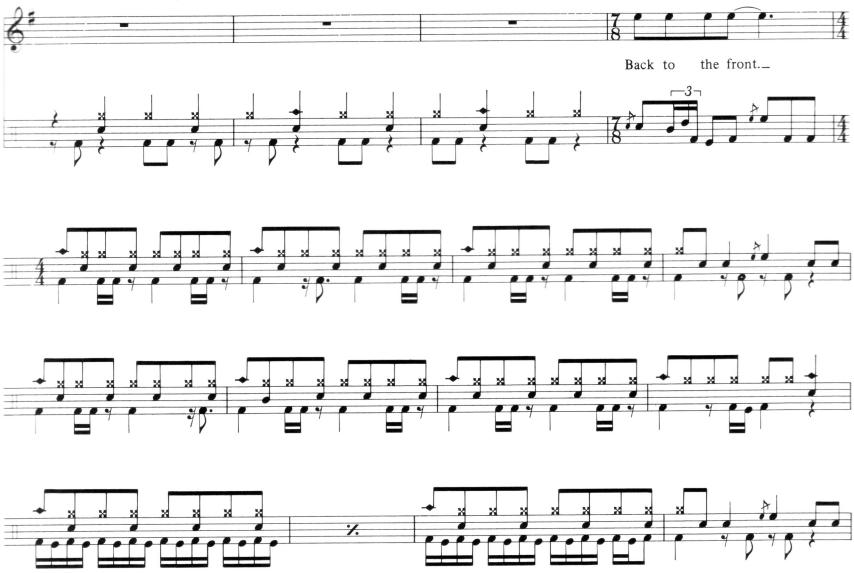
2 Ex. 2 The Shortest Straw: 3rd Verse, bars 9 – 17

ROSS HALFIN

Let's take a look at 16th notes that are in groups. When 16th notes are put in groups of more than four, you will see a number indicating how many notes are to be played in the space of one beat. Here, the number six is used, which is called a *sextuplet.* So six 16th notes are played to each quarter note.

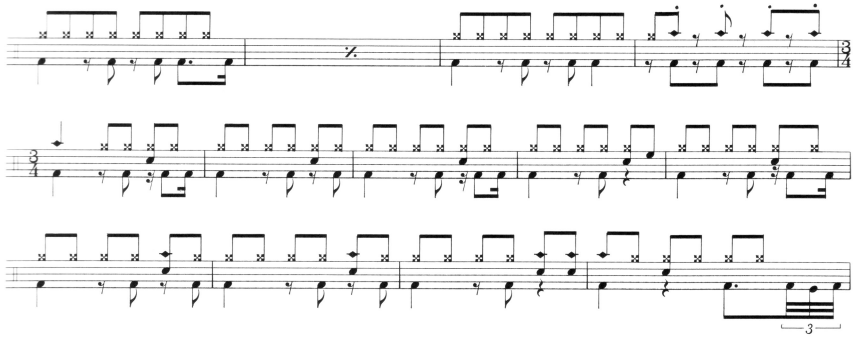
This example is taken from "One" (*...And Justice For All*). Notice how Lars blends 3/4 into 4/4 without preparation—a recurring technique of his.

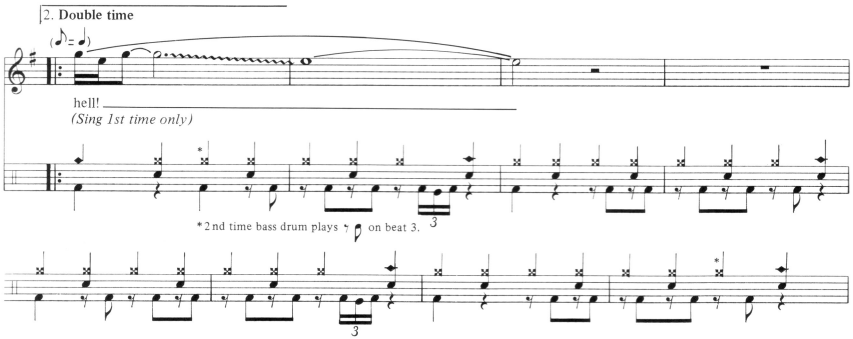
3 Ex. 3 One: 18 bars before the words "Darkness imprisoning me ... "

Another amazing feat (pun intended) Lars is capable of is intricate single bass drum work. He combines this with double bass phrases. For an example, let's look at "Blackened" (*...And Justice For All*), Drum Figure 1. Notice it is in 7/4.

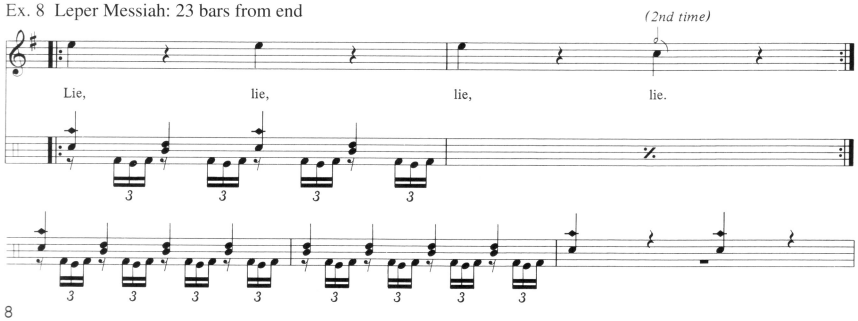
4 Ex. 4 Blackened: Drum Fig. 1

To see a different aspect of this technique, let's go to "Disposable Heroes" (*Master Of Puppets*). This example occurs 31 bars from the end and contains three different feel changes. Notice how Lars gradually introduces the 16th notes, making the transition seem smooth and effortless.

5 Ex. 5 Disposable Heroes: 31 bars from end

Lars has become known as a triplet master. His use of 16th-note triplets before a snare hit has become a signature lick. Placement is important with this type of lick, as it can quickly amount to overkill. As we look at some examples, it will be clear that Lars uses this lick freely, either to give strength to the note immediately following, or in succession, to create an individual phrase or groove.

The first example is from "One" (*...And Justice For All*). Starting on bar 34 of this section, 32nd-note triplets are used as a result of the tempo (only a moderate 108 beats per minute). In this song, the lick is used sporadically throughout, adding support and color. Later, when the tune is in double time, we see a 16th-note triplet is used, though intermittently.

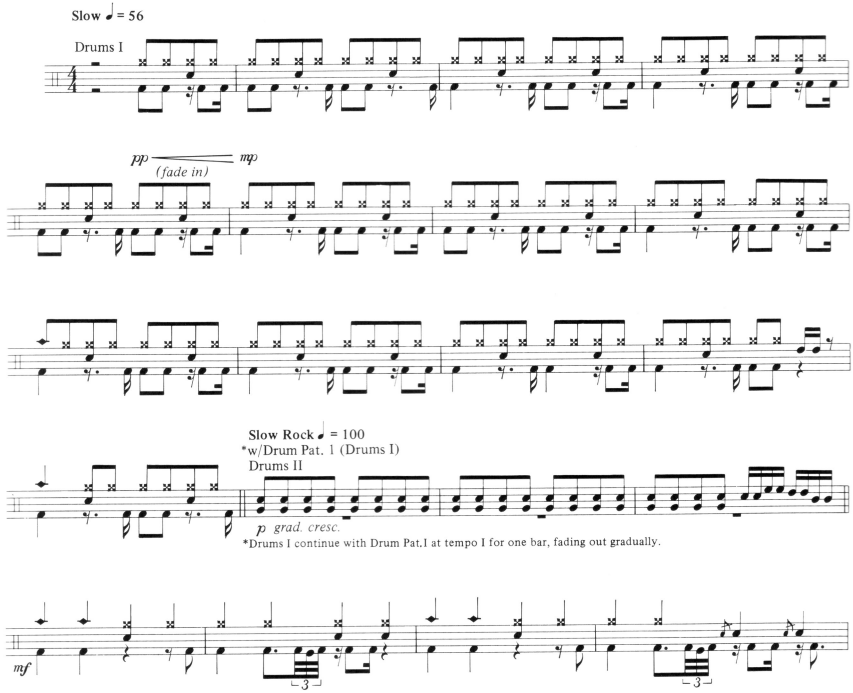
6 Ex. 6 One: bars 31 – 42

Here we see the double time section with the 16th-note triplets.

7 Ex. 7 One: 24 bars before Guitar solo

"Leper Messiah" (*Master Of Puppets*) puts this particular lick into a phrase (23 bars from the end). This phrase helps support the vocal line, while still being different from the rest of the song, thus providing contrast. Also, playing the snare on the downbeats creates a strong forward drive in this section.

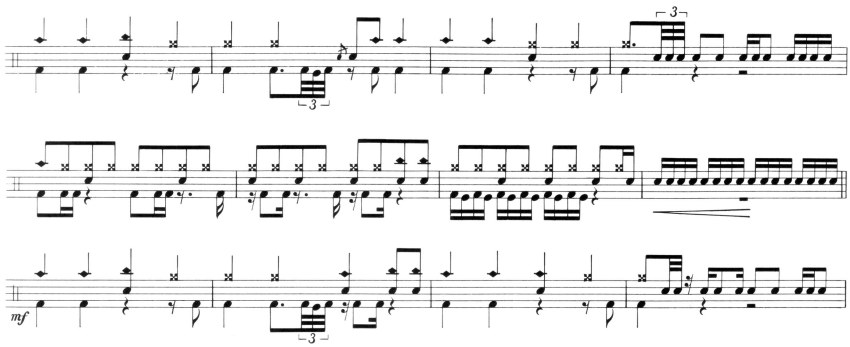
8 Ex. 8 Leper Messiah: 23 bars from end

FEEL CHANGES

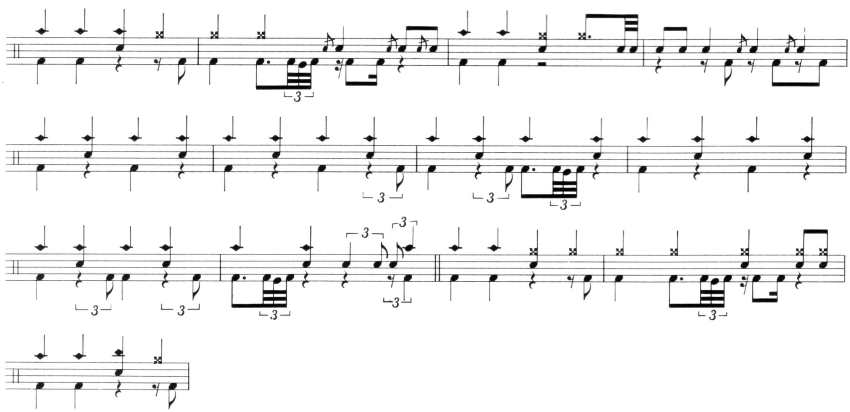
Feel changes give songs a new mood or direction. It's an effective tactic, but not one that is easily accepted. Changing feels is something that requires extensive practice to make smooth, and it happens to be another skill Lars has mastered. A perfect representation of this can be seen in "To Live Is To Die" (*...And Justice For All*). Since this particular tune is all instrumental, the many feel changes keep the song interesting and moving. There are a total of seven feel changes in the song. Let's start with the intro. It begins with a slow ballad feel, the first change coming after only 14 bars—using three bars of 8th notes on the snare and low tom as a transition.

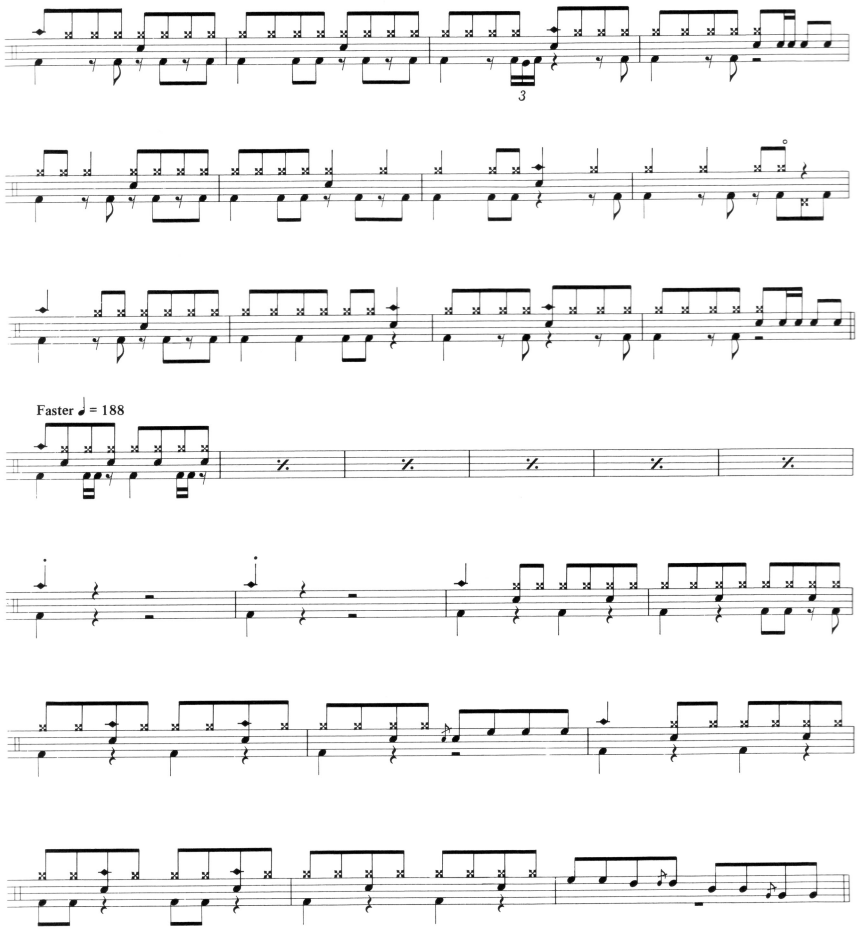
9 Ex. 1 To Live Is To Die



Just 29 bars into the song, we come across another feel change. Notice how Lars plays off the guitar riff. Although this portion has a different feel, it is still part of the original section. Let's start on bar 25.

10 Ex. 2 To Live Is To Die: bars 25 – 34

In bar 53, a new feel is introduced: a shuffle groove. Notice how the drums play straight against the guitars' shuffle rhythm. (This goes on for eight bars.) This starts on bar 49.

11 Ex. 3 To Live Is To Die: bars 49 – 61

Another example of Metallica's typical feel changing is heard in "Disposable Heroes" (*Master Of Puppets*). Starting on bar 37, Lars plays a half time feel at approximately 172 beats per minute; then notice the tempo changes to 188 b.p.m. This occurs at the beginning of the six-bar phrase where the snare plays on the *and* of every beat, giving the feel more intensity and making it seem faster. The following two bars are considered a "setup" to the next transition. (The term "setup" is used when something is played to anticipate a change.) Keeping the same tempo, Lars plays the next section very straight, creating an open groove.

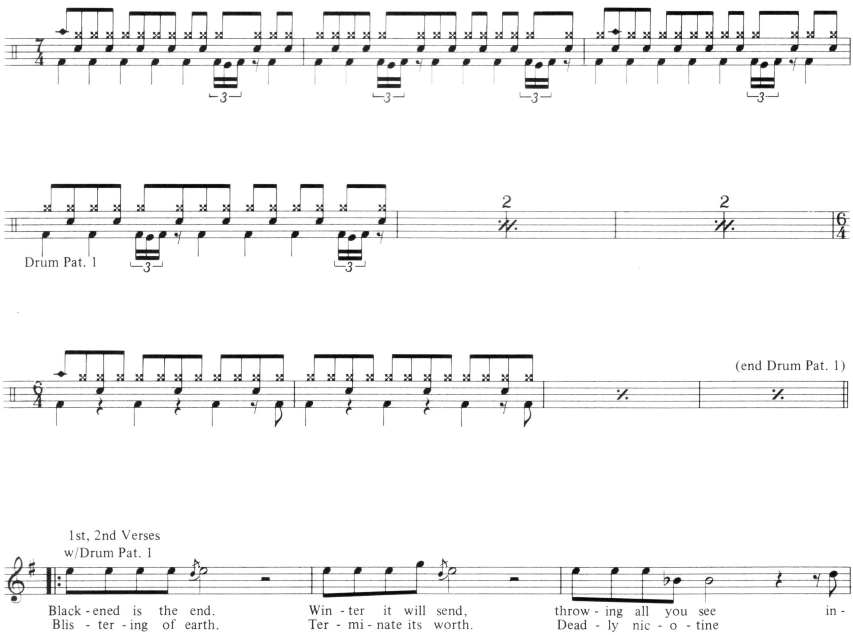
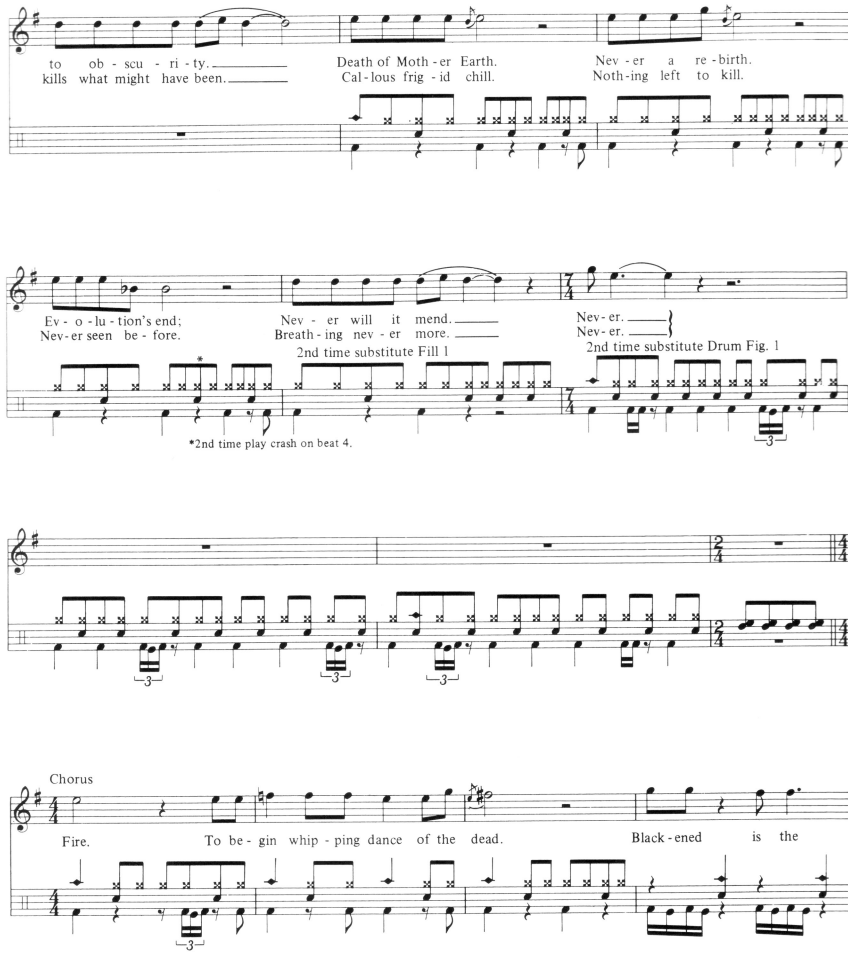
12 Ex. 4 Disposable Heroes: bars 37 – 64

ODD TIME SIGNATURES

In the world of heavy metal and rock music, the 4/4 time signature was considered standard—that is, until Metallica came along. Lars and company have rewritten the rules concerning time signatures. But a heavy metal tune with seven different time signatures—and those seven alternating with each other 48 times? But it works! It works exceptionally well.

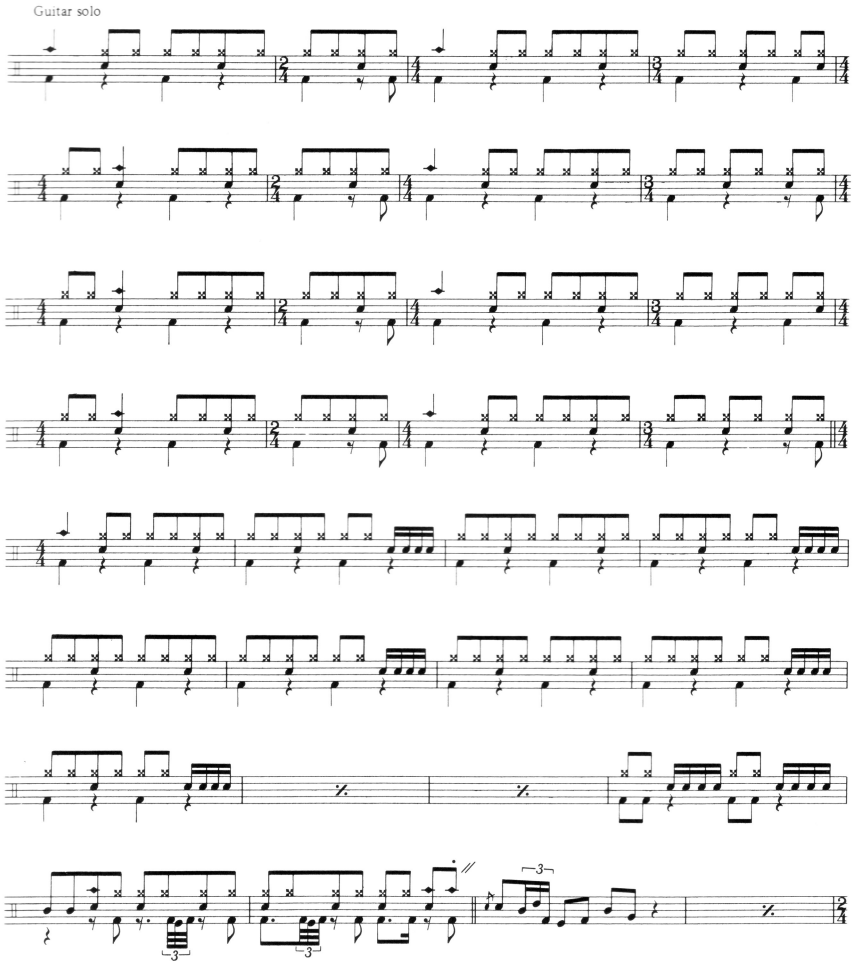
Starting in 5/4, then going through 4/4, 7/4, 6/4, 2/4, 3/4, 5/8 (not necessarily in that order), "Blackened" (*...And Justice For All*) is unique in its approach to time signatures. Even with all the meter changes, the phrasing flows smoothly, enabling the changes to seem organic to both the trained and untrained ear. Since there are so many changes, we will examine some of the more revealing examples is this section.

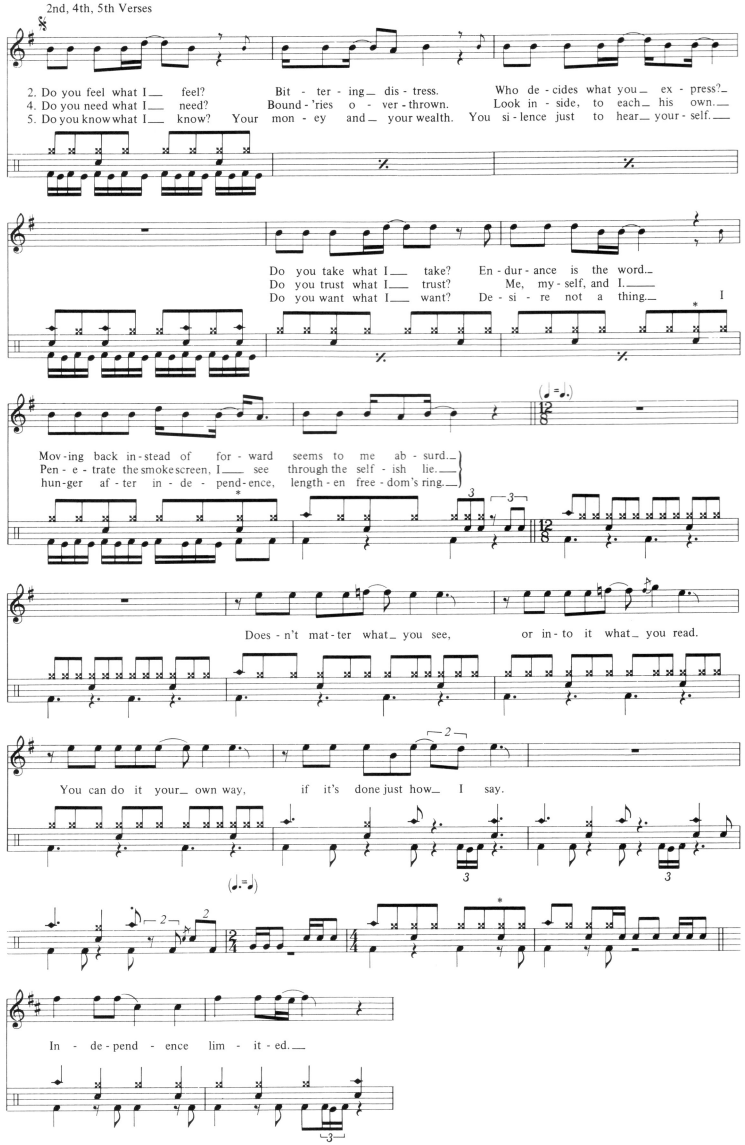
Let's start with the first groove section, the 18th bar of the intro. This begins in 7/4 and continues for eight bars before going into 6/4, lasting 12 bars. It then returns to 7/4 for three bars, and one bar of 2/4, which sets up the following eight bars of 4/4.

Although there are three different time signatures in the example, the feel change is more evident than the meter change, with the exception of the 2/4 bar, which is quite obvious.

13 Ex. 1 Blackened: bars 19 – 46

Now let's take a look at the mathematics involved in the guitar solo section of "Blackened." Since 4/4 is considered common time, the odd bars here are 2/4 and 3/4. There are four bars each, so adding two 3/4 bars to one 2/4 bar equals one 8/4 bar, or two bars of 4/4. This happens twice, leaving two bars of 2/4 (equaling one bar of 4/4).

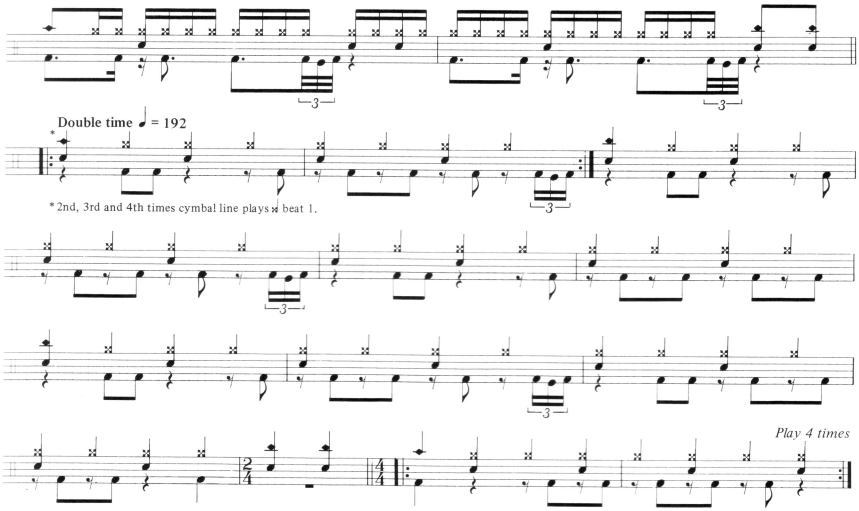
When odd bars are used, it is common to see another odd bar to equal it out. For example, a 5/4 bar might be equaled out with a 3/4 later in the section. In this example, there is a definite pattern. One bar of 4/4, one bar of 2/4, one bar of 4/4, and one bar of 3/4. This phrase repeats itself four times before going to 16 consecutive bars of 4/4.

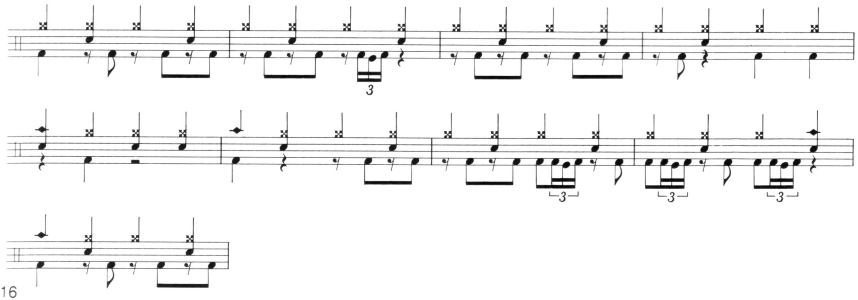
14 Ex. 2 Blackened: Guitar solo

In the next example from "Eye Of The Beholder" (*...And Justice For All*), in the second verse, we find constant 16th notes on the bass drums, with beats two and four on the snare in 4/4. In bar four, notice the fill Lars plays. He accents the snare and crash cymbal while keeping the groove going on the bass drums. This type of fill can be heard throughout his playing. In bar eight, there is a setup fill leading to 12/8 (12 eighth notes per bar). This kind of fill is necessary to make smooth transitions. An ensemble figure is heard in bar 6 of the 12/8 section (all instruments play the riff together in lock-step), a four-bar phrase with the fourth bar in 2/4, returning to 4/4.

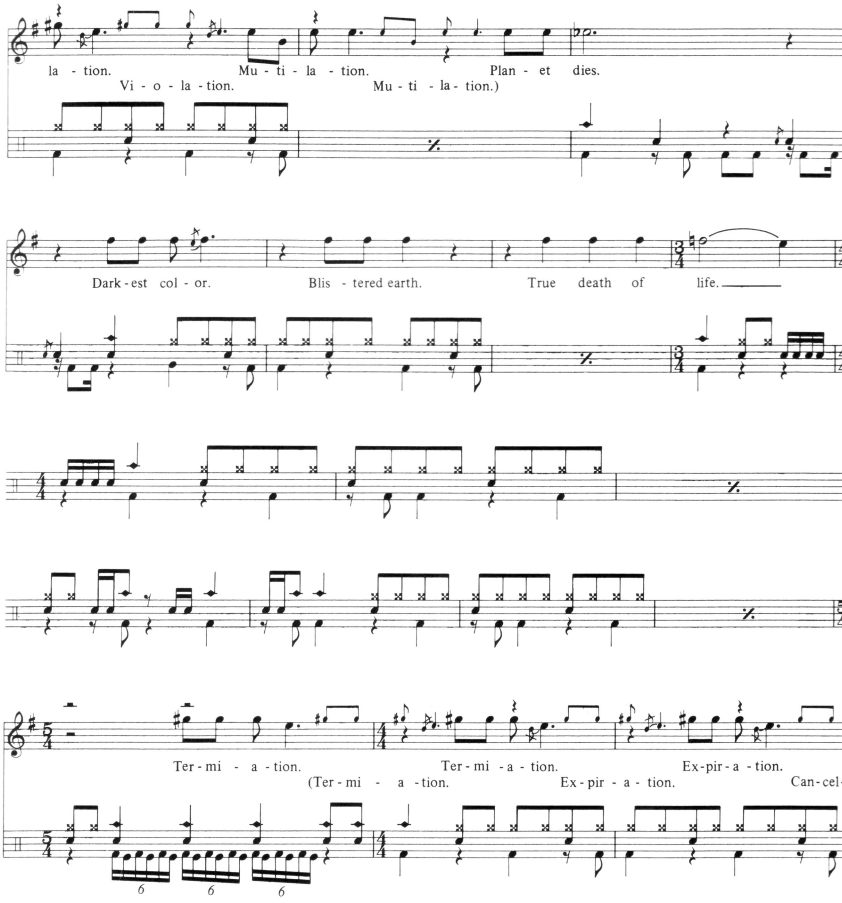
Ex. 3 Eye Of The Beholder: Verse

TURNING THE BEAT AROUND

The advantages of turning the beat around are numerous, as Lars has shown time and again in his drum work. Just as one thinks the backbeat is on two and four, Lars changes it to one and three, and the transition is seamless. Turning the beat around can act as a counterpart to a guitar riff or add a twist to the music without changing the time signature—although Lars often uses one bar of odd time to set up a turnaround or to come back to the original two and four backbeat. Lars will also use a two-bar turnaround as a lick to color a particular groove.

In the first lesson on turning the beat around, let's look at "The Frayed Ends Of Sanity" (*...And Justice For All*), the instrumental section before the guitar solo. Lars turns the beat around by accenting beats four and one with the snare and crash cymbal, while keeping the snare on one and three. Seventeen bars later, he uses a 2/4 bar to bring the backbeat to two and four. Only at this point does the listener know for sure what has happened.

16 Ex. 1 The Frayed Ends Of Sanity: 2 bars before Double time section

In the guitar solo, we hear a two-bar turnaround phrase, giving the groove a little something extra.

17 Ex. 2 The Frayed Ends Of Sanity: Guitar solo

"Blackened" (*...And Justice For All*) has an example of clever phrasing. Lars plays what is called an "over-the-barline" fill. This example contains two. The second one institutes the turnaround by using a 3/4 bar. If the 3/4 bar had been a 4/4 bar, the crash would have been on beat one. With the 3/4 bar, he brings the backbeat to two and four.

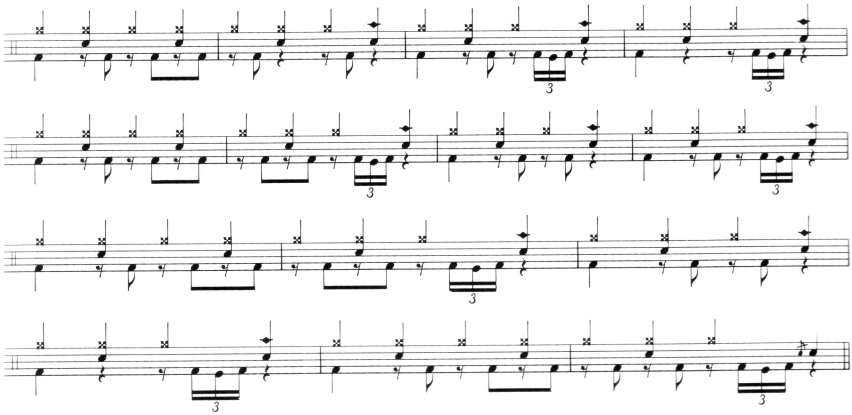
18 Ex. 3 Blackened: 23 bars after Interlude

ENSEMBLE FIGURES

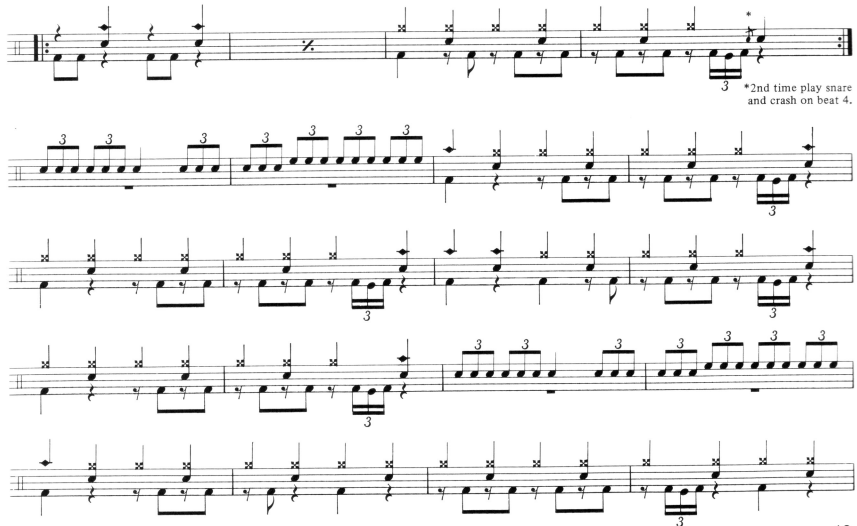
Imagine being in a room with 50 people on one side and four on the other. The side with 50 people is talking loudly, and only one of the four from the other side is shouting "May I have your attention?" One person shouting over 50 is not very successful; he goes unnoticed. However, when all four shout the same words together, commanding attention is inevitable. In music, this is called an "ensemble figure"—when all instruments play the same rhythmical or melodic phrase together. This device is universal; it can be found in every type of music, used in different ways. For example, it can be found as a way to state a song's theme, or it could be used in intros and endings, or to set up a transition. Whenever used, ensemble figures are powerful and definitely draw attention. In Metallica's hair-raising repertoire, these figures can be heard in many forms—some are subtle, others obvious. Ensemble figures greatly contribute to Metallica's distinctive writing style and overall impact.

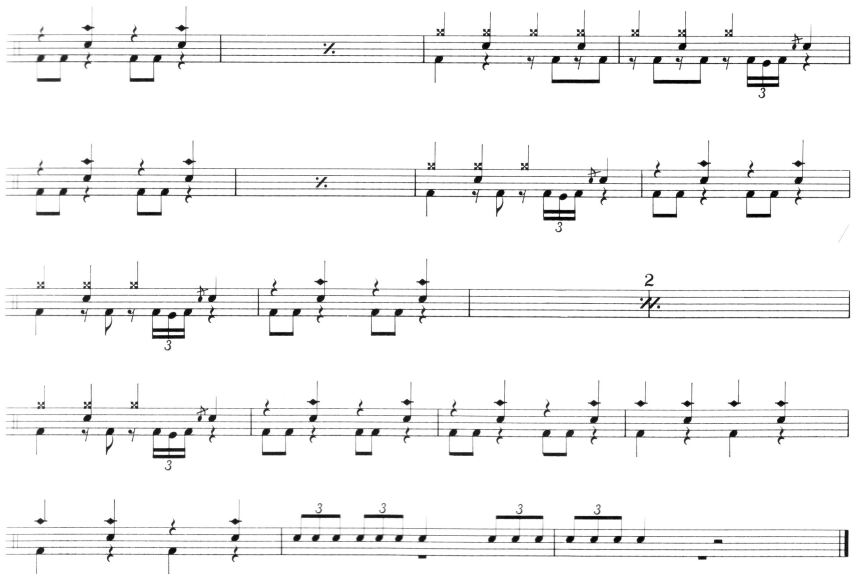
Ensemble figures in a solo section are common, as they add strength and color to a part that otherwise might sound monotonous. A terrific example of this is found in "One" (*...And Justice For All*), 24 bars before the guitar solo. This is a 12-bar phrase this is repeated until the solo. Notice that the figure crosses over the barline, creating an odd-time feel. This example starts on the repeat going directly to the solo.

19 Ex. 1 One: 24 bars before Guitar solo

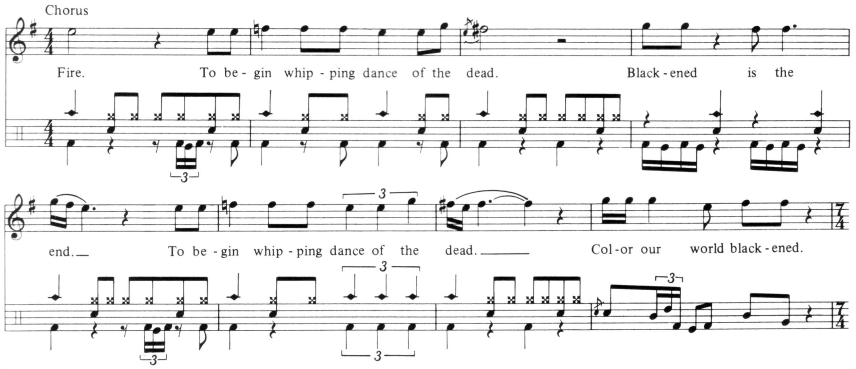
In bars 9 and 10 of the guitar solo, the last half of the figure is heard again. Let's start on bar 5 of the solo.

20 Ex. 2 One: Guitar solo, bars 5 – 20

In bar 27, a new ensemble figure is introduced. This is a two-bar pattern in a four-bar repeated phrase. It sets up a new section which starts with a variation of the original ensemble figure in bars 35 and 36 of the solo, and is also found in bars 45 and 46.

21 Ex. 3 One: Guitar solo, bars 27 – 50

Nineteen bars from the end, notice how many times the second ensemble figure is played. The song ends with the first half of the original figure on beat two.

22 Ex. 4 One: 19 bars from end

In the chorus section of "Blackened" (*...And Justice For All*), there are three different types of ensemble figures. The first is a riff that supports the vocal line, with the instruments playing 16th notes against the 8th-note vocal line. The second figure is played with the vocal, using quarter-note triplets. In the third, the vocal, guitar, and bass play together, while the drums play a variation of the figure.

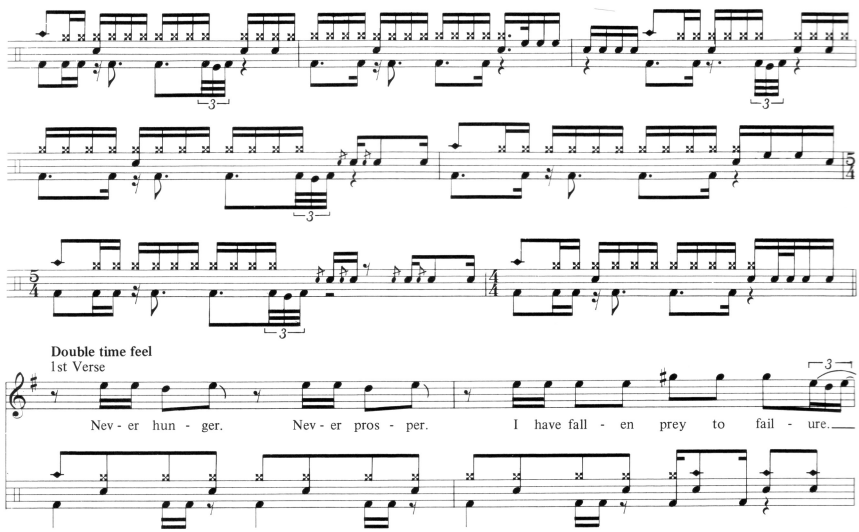
23 Ex. 5 Blackened: Chorus

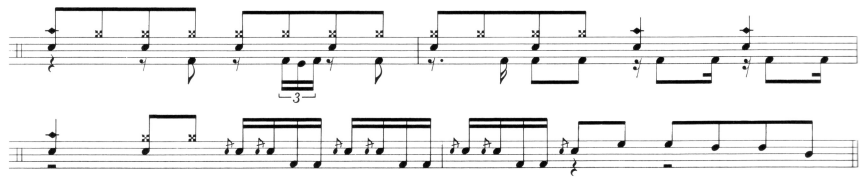


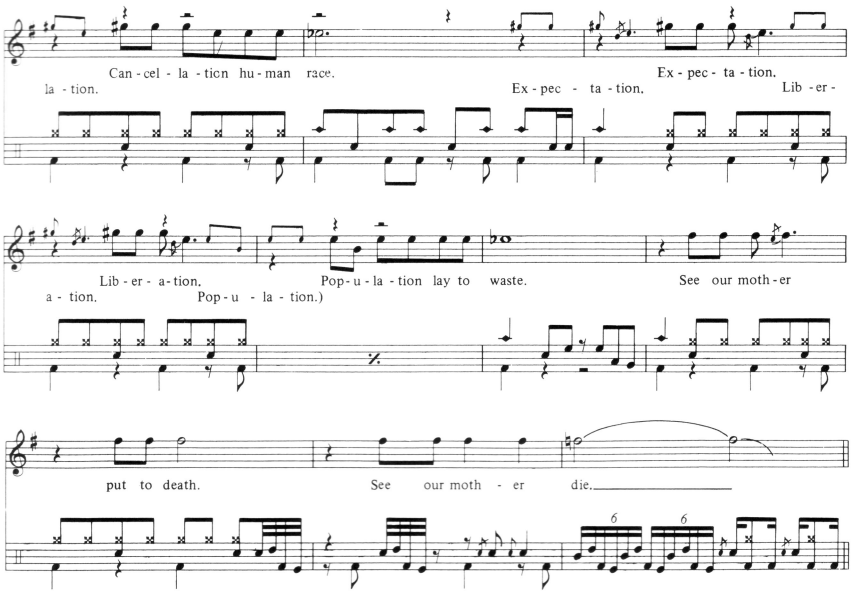
DRUM FILLS

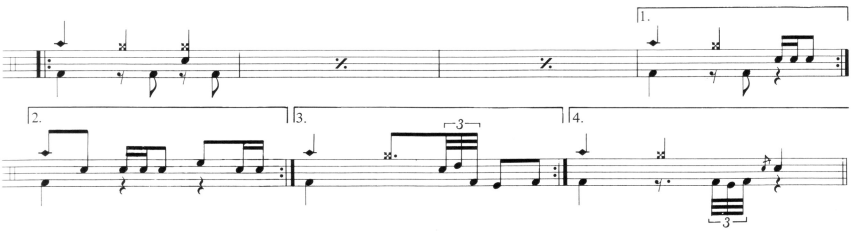
Drum fills give the drummer a brief opportunity for individual expression. In Metallica's music, this has become a group effort, as Lars seldom plays "The Big Drum Fill." Although he does play interesting random fills to add color and contrast, the majority of Lars' work is in ensemble figure form, to set up a transition, or to signal the end of a phrase. When Lars plays a fill, it is in musical context, to support a particular phrase, not to call attention to the drums for a bar or two. A favorite device of Lars' is the "over-the-barline" fill. This is a fill that crosses from one bar to the next, creating an odd-time feel. This can be heard throughout the body of Lars' masterful work.

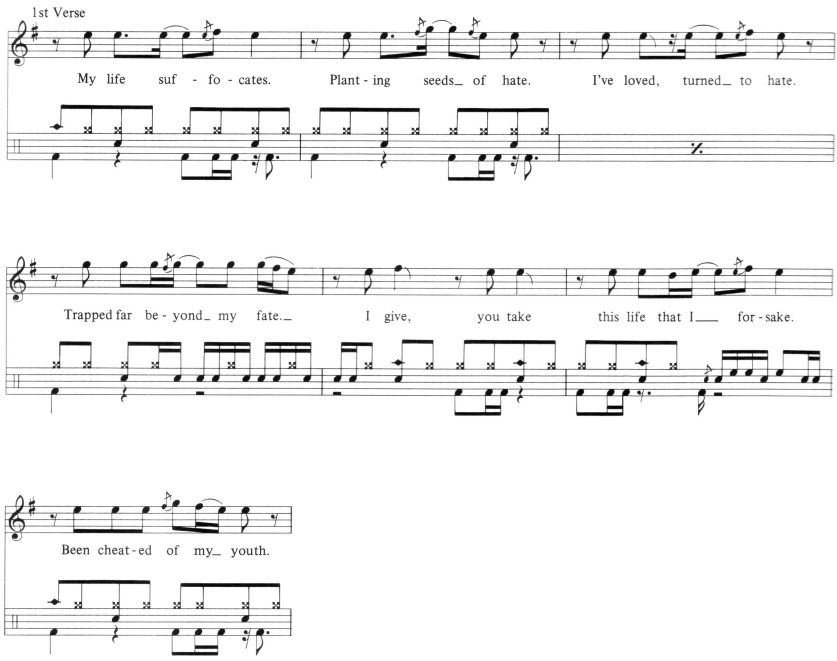
In "The Frayed Ends Of Sanity" (*...And Justice For All*), bars 22 and 23, an over-the-barline fill is heard, followed by four more bars, containing two ensemble figures in bars 24, and then again in bar 26. This sets up the first verse.

24 Ex. 1 The Frayed Ends Of Sanity: bars 21 – 29

In "The Shortest Straw" (*...And Justice For All*), the last four bars that set up the final chorus, we hear a fill using 16th notes between the snare and bass. Notice the snare is playing flams. (A flam consists of two strokes played close together, the first being a grace note.) This gives a thicker sound. Let's start two bars before the fill.

25 Ex. 2 The Shortest Straw: 4 bars before Chorus

There is some creative fill work in "Blackened" (*...And Justice For All*), 10 bars before the guitar solo. Notice how Lars fills up the empty space left by the vocal line. Then he sets up the solo in the last three bars with a very nice form of phrasing, using 32nd notes and sextuplets to add a driving, forward movement.

26 Ex. 3 Blackened: 10 bars before Guitar solo

In ending a phrase it is common to use a fill. Its length can be one bar, one beat, or even a fraction of a beat. In this example, the four-bar phrase has four different endings, due to the four different fills used to end each phrase. This starts on bar 104 of "To Live Is To Die" (*...And Justice For All*).

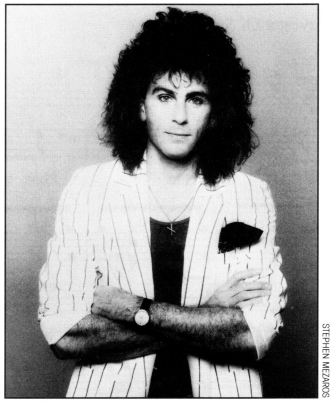
27 Ex. 4 To Live Is To Die: bars 104 – 119

In our final example, we see how Lars makes good use of fills that do not interfere with the groove; this method is helpful in adding color to a song. In "Harvester Of Sorrow" (*...And Justice For All*), bars 4 and 5 of the first verse, a non-disrupting fill is played that also crosses over the barline.

28 Ex. 5 Harvester Of Sorrow: Verse

About the Author

Dino Fauci has been playing drums for 16 years, and has studied privately with David Garibaldi, Gregg Bissonette, and Peter Erskin, to name a few. He has also completed the percussion program at the Grove School of Music.

Dino has appeared in the Star Jam video series featuring John Bonham, and the "Beginning Rock Drum Video" for Star Licks. He has transcribed two Winger albums (featuring Rod Morgenstein) for Hal Leonard Publishing, and the video workbook for the Randy Castillo video (Star Licks). He has also appeared on numerous Guitar Trax cuts for Cherry Lane Music.

Dino lives in the Los Angeles area where he is active in the club and studio scene.



STEPHEN MEZADORIS

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METALLICA'S
Lars Ulrich

by Dino Fauci

An up-close look at the playing style of heavy metal's leading drummer using ***actual transcribed examples*** *from these Metallica hits:*

Blackened
Disposable Heroes
Dyers Eve
Eye of the Beholder
The Frayed Ends of Sanity
Harvester of Sorrow
Leper Messiah
One
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To Live Is to Die

Includes CD of All Musical Examples